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TITLE: " Retention of Knowledge, Attitude, and Behavior Changes Towards Safer Sex in African-Caribbean Adolescent HIV Peer Educators

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ISSUE: Caribbean. African and Latino youth are culturally isolated concerning the dissemination of information on HIV infection, condom usage, and prevention.

SETTING: The Adolescent Education Program and Teens Helping Each Other Project targets the Central Brooklyn area in New York. The peer educators attend high schools and colleges in New York City. The (25) peer educators range in ages from 13-21.

PROJECT: The Adolescent Education Program of the State University of New York Research Foundation at Downstate Medical Center has successfully created a comprehensive peer education program that monitors behavioral changes in African, Latino and Caribbean-American adolescents towards safer sex, experimental drug use and condom use. The program conducts KAB (Knowledge, Attitude, and Behavioral) studies with students upon entry and exit from the Peer program. The average time of participation in the program for a peer educator is two-four years.

RESULTS: The findings of the KAB studies are as follows: The adolescent educators respond to the peer to peer support system developed by the program and relate to each other based on age appropriateness, cultural parallelism and language similitude. Studies show that peer education can be a credible tool in changing behavior of at-risk adolescents. Peers can empower each other to become critical thinkers, thus making decisions toward a healthier lifestyle. Teen peer educators communicate with each other utilizing a language that initiates positive behavioral changes towards safer sex and condom usage. The peer educators who are sexually active have increased condom use (**44%**) since participating in the program or have chosen to be abstinent (**56%**). A high percentage of our peer educators (**86%**) have shown an increase in their self-esteem since becoming a peer educator. THEO Peer educators (**69%**) discuss HIV prevention strategies with their friends and (**93%**) feel they have been trained to use a condom correctly. Male peer educators (**86%**) and female peer educators (**40%**) have changed their behavior to reduce their risk of becoming infected with HIV. Since becoming peer educators (**100%**) of the students have remained drug free.

LESSONS LEARNED: 1) Increased knowledge base in this high risk population with information about HIV/AIDS; 2) Decreased risk of transmission in this population through peer to peer support systems; 3) Participants learned prevention skills to combat the spread of the virus and other sexually transmitted diseases. ; 4) Participants learned sexual negotiation, assertiveness, and social interaction skills; 5) Increased levels of self-esteem in this high risk group; 6) Increased utilization of condoms for protection against infection.

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